

THE
Perfection of Scripture
STATED,
And Its
SUFFICIENCY
ARGUED;
IN A
SERMON
PREACHED at the
Publick Commencement
AT
CAMBRIDGE.
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II. TIMOTH. iii 16, 17.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof; for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

THE Apostle having had occasion in the *fifteenth* Verse to mention the Holy Scriptures, under that general Character, of being able to make Timothy *wise unto Salvation*, thought fit to enlarge somewhat more upon so glorious a Subject, and to give this particular and very magnificent Commendation of them, which is contained in the Words now read to you.

For the better understanding whereof, and setting the Argument comprehended under them in its true Light, permit me briefly to premise a few Observations, with regard to the Expressions themselves.

I. The *First* of these relates to the Subject-Matter of the Assertion, *All Scripture*; where, I need not tell you, That St. Paul by *Scripture* meant those

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Writings,

Writings, which were generally received and revered in the Church of God, as authentick Significations of his good Pleasure. Such were the Books of the Old Testament, acknowledged to come from Heaven by the Mouth and Ministry of the Prophets; and these seem to have been the Scriptures which *Timothy* is said to have known from a child. (v. 15.) And such likewise were those of the New Testament then extant, which (if we attend to the * Time of sending this Epistle) many, indeed most, except the Writings of *St. John*, seem to have been.

* Ann. Chr. LXVII. Neron, XIII. vide Pearson. Cestr. in Apol. Paulin.

† So Scultetus in locum: Chemoitius Exam. Conc Trident. P. I. cap. 1. Gerhard. Loc. Commun. de Sacr. Script. cap. XVIII.

p. 147.

|| Nomen Graecum *πᾶς* interdum Universalitatem significat, interdum Integritatem. Ita hic *πᾶς* *γραφή*

idem est quod *ἅπλητος*, adeoque recte vertitur *Tota Scriptura*. Scultet.

Qui nostram Interpretationem respuunt, obtundunt non dici *πᾶς* *ἢ* *γραφή* sed *πᾶς* *γραφή*. Sed nec si sequaris Interpretationem nostram opus erit Articulo. Vox enim *γραφή* nonnunquam etiam sine Articulo, sine Adjectivo, sumitur Autonomastice, ut Rom. I. 2. 2 Pet. I. 20. Jac. Cappell.

Si *διὰ πᾶσιν* sumas vocem *διὰ πάντων*, & vocem *πᾶς* veritas omnis, in calles indues te, ex quibus vix te possis expedire. Quasi vel minimus Scripturae Sacrae usus habeat omnes hos usus quos hic describit Apostolus. Jac. Cappell. Vide quæ Scultetus ad locum & Gerhard. à Bellarmino depromptis respondent. Loc. Comm. Part. I. Cap. 18. de Sacr. Script. p. 146, 147.

deed.

deed is true even in this more rigid Construction, and an equal necessity of the Writers being led into all Truth, and secured from all Errour, seems to lie upon every part of a Book intended for the Guide of Souls. But most assuredly it is neither True, nor Necessary, nor so much as Possible, that each particular Passage should be of that general Profit and Perfection, and serve the several Purposes specified in my Text. And This I take to be so plain and obvious, that nothing could excuse the mention of it, had not some Writers of great and very boasted Name, been content to stoop to so poor a shift as That of alledging against the Protestant Opinion concerning the Perfection of Scripture, That this Text to *Timothy* either proves nothing at all in favour of it, or it proves a great deal too much : as making every Book, and every Period, a perfect Rule of Faith and Life ; by saying that *All Scripture* is thus inspired and thus exceeding profitable.

To these Scriptures thus considered, our Apostle gives two Noble Commendations ; *First*, That of their Divine Original, *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God*. *Secondly*, That of their general Usefulness. And This again is farther illustrated, by instancing, *First*, in the several Particulars, to which that Usefulness extends, *The Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*. *Secondly*, By declaring the degree of this Usefulness, and the Efficacy of the Scriptures in those respects, for that by their means the *man of God* is capable of becoming perfect, and thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

* Cajetan.
Chemnirius.
Hemingius.
Vatablus Ca-
stallo.
† Scultetus.
Grosius. Ger-
hard. &c.

By the *Man of God*, the matter is not great whether we understand, (with * some Interpreters) Every good Christian, whose Heart and Life is devoted to the Service and Obedience of God; Or whether (with † Others,) the Bishops and Pastors of the Church; such as *Timothy* himself was, and who being dedicated and retaining to God in a more peculiar manner, have a Title to this Character distinct from the rest of Mankind. For in both senses the Argument comes all to One. Since what the Pastors are bound to teach, the same their Flocks are bound to know, and believe, and do: So that this is but One thing considered under different respects. And therefore what is sufficient or defective for a Rule to Men in One of these Capacities, must consequently be in proportion so to Men in the Other.

Once more. That the Scripture is a sufficient Supply for all the Necessities of this kind, the Apostle declares, by saying, *That the man of God may be perfected by it, and thoroughly furnished to every good work.* For That cannot be perfect which wants any of its substantial Parts, nor is He *thoroughly furnished* who is still under a necessity of seeking Supplies elsewhere.

The Text in all this Latitude, ministers much more Matter of Discourse, than either the Time or Your Patience can allow to be handled distinctly. And therefore omitting wholly that first Part, which concerns the Divine Original of Scripture; as less suitable, and I hope the less needful for this Mixt Audience; I beg Leave to confine my self to the Latter, which the Church of *England*, our Wife and Holy Mother, hath thus

thus exprest in her Sixth Article of Religion: *The Holy Scripture containeth all Things necessary to Salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any Man, that it should be believed as an Article of Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to Salvation.* If this be once acknowledged for Truth, I do not see how any Man so persuaded, can deny the Scripture's Ability of *making us Wise unto Salvation*, and being a Compleat Guide in Points of Faith and Manners. And such I shall endeavour to prove it, by shewing,

I. *First*, What manner of Perfection that is, which Men ought to attribute to Scripture, and are warrantred to expect from it.

II. *Secondly*, What general Arguments we have to ground this Opinion upon; and

III. *Thirdly*, How the Scripture answers this Character in those particular Instances mention'd by my Text.

I. *First*. I am to consider, What manner or sort of Perfection that is, which we are allowed to attribute to, and to expect from the Scriptures. And This deserves to be the more heedfully attended to, because the Liberty Some have taken of imposing other Guides and Rules, besides the Scripture; and the imprudent Zeal of Others, who profess to follow this in every Thing, and hang upon the Word and Letter of Scripture; have given Birth to many extravagant Opinions, and greatly disturb'd Christianity and good Order.

Now

Now, Scripture being in the Nature of a Medium or Instrument directed to a certain End, the best and most regular Way of coming to a right Understanding in this Matter, will be to take a short View of the Design of Scripture, and what Degree of Perfection is necessary to answer that Design. Or to keep close to St. Paul's Expression, *v. 15.* To examine what is meant by *Salvation*, and what is requisite to qualifie us for, and make us *Wise unto Salvation*.

1. *First*, Salvation is but another Word for that Eternal Happiness, which God hath appointed to be the Ultimate and Chief Good of Humane Nature; This Happiness is propos'd not as our Fate, but as our Reward; and since every Reward supposes some Works in Consideration whereof the Recompence is bestow'd, it implieth, that Men must contribute something to their own Happiness, and cannot reasonably hope to obtain it, without attending to those Conditions, upon the Performance of which the Reward is suspended. It implies farther, that the Notices of these Conditions, and the Right of appointing them, must come from, and are Originally lodged in Him, who proposes and promises that Recompence. And, if our Expectations and Desires of this Happy State, be Natural and Universal, it will follow from hence too, that Nature furnishes Mankind with some sort of Means and Abilities, as well as Inclinations, to aspire after it: For the Wisdom and Goodness of the Creator is most eminently seen in This; that he deludes none of his Creatures with vain Expectations, nor infuses any such Desires into them, as must of Necessity

cessary be disappointed. These Abilities I take to have been given in those general Notions of Good and Evil, imprest upon the Mind of Man, at his First Creation. With regard to which St. Paul mentions a Law written in the Hearts of Those, to whom the written Law was not imparted. He observes the same pleasing Transports, the same melancholy Misgivings to rise in their Breasts, according as Their Consciences accuse, or excuse them: He declares, that in the Last Great Day of Account, They shall be judged upon this Issue. Since then, there was a Time, when Man enjoyed no written Word at all; since after some Parts of the World were blest with such Revelation, yet Others were unfortunate in the Want of it; Since even Those who had it not, were yet Accountable for their Actions, The Consequence is Plain and Necessary; that the Holy Scriptures are not the Only Method whereby God hath been pleased to inform Men of their Duty; They were not the First, they were not the Universal, and consequently not the sole and perpetual Instrument of all our Privileges, and all our Obedience.

Rom. II. 13,
14, 15.

2. But *Secondly*, Whatever hopes Men could by Nature have, these had no other Foundation, than a just and punctual Performance; and therefore Sin quite altered the Case, and made a farther Revelation necessary. What St. Paul says elsewhere of the Jewish Law, may with great Truth, and in a very good Sense, be affirmed of *All Scripture*, that it was *added because of Transgression*. To Persons thus concluded under Forfeiture, no Expectation justly could be cherished,

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no Succour or solid Comfort could arise, otherwise than from God's express Declaration, that he would condescend to fresh Conditions, and admit us to another and better Covenant, such as our laps'd and guilty State would bear. Hence, sure it is, that the present Methods of Salvation, are term'd, *The Secret of the Lord, The Mystery of our Redemption*, and the like; because These are some of the the unsearchable Depths of infinite Wisdom and Goodness, such as no Humane Discourse could penetrate into, no natural Conclusions could infer: And, because God was perfectly Free in this whole Matter, he let Men into the Knowledge of it, by such gradual Discoveries, as himself saw fit; and such as darkened and degenerate Minds were capable of. This is the shining Ray then darted from above, to give our Souls once more the chearing Prospect of Bliss Divine and Love Incomprehensible. 'Tis thus we are supported and assured, that our Judge is not Irreconcilable, that our Sicknesses are not yet unto Death, provided We will lend a helping Hand, and not obstruct our own Recovery: But still all this was not a new Creation, but a Cure; and therefore, like Other Remedies, applyed only, so far as the Disease required: In other Respects, it left Men as it found them, and the Benefits of it will be still more distinctly understood, if we be Diligent to observe.

3. *Thirdly.* That God in all his Dealings with Mankind does not act so much in Proportion to his Own Fulness, as to Our Wants. And therefore we have Reason to look upon those

Disco-

Discoveries of his Will to be Perfect, which revealed, not all that could be revealed, but all that Men had Occasion for. In this Sense the more sparing Revelations heretofore were perfect in their Kind, though in Degree and Measure short of Ours. The Impressions of Reason at Man's First Creation, were so in some Sense, because that State needed no more. So were the Private and Personal Discoveries after the Fall, the Jewish Law and Predictions of the Prophets afterwards, Each of which had their Day, and proper Season; as the Manifestations of the Gospel have Theirs Now, which are *συντέλεια τῆ αἰῶνος*, the last concluding Dispensation, that which completes, confirms, and closes up all the rest. In judging therefore the Perfection of Scripture, we must ever attend to the Design it serves, and its Sufficiency to compass that Design. For Example: In the Historical Part, we are not to expect a full and just Relation of all that happened in the World at that Time; no nor of all that happened to that People, of whose Affairs it more professedly treats; a Competent Quantity of the main and most significant Passages will serve the turn; such as draw down a just Account of our Blessed Saviour, and wherein the Law and Polity of the Jews, were Types of Him, or of the Christian Church.

So again, The Prophecies do not foretell all that should happen under the Gospel, nor every Thing to be done by our Lord himself; but are contented with drawing the Principal Lines, and giving Representations, and Characters, so like, and lively, as when the Son of God should appear in Flesh, and Events came to be compared

with Predictions, might render Men exceedingly to blame, if they did not accept and regard That Person, as the promised Messias, in whom those Descriptions so exactly center'd. Nay, even in the Gospel it self, St. *John* makes no Difficulty to own, that a World of remarkable and wonderful Things done by Christ, are not, however, left upon Record; but that Enough are left to build Men's Faith upon. Now, it cannot be deny'd, but the All-wise God could, under each of those Periods, have inspired the Holy Pen-Men with all that are omitted; or that he could, if he had pleas'd, have made but One Period, and revealed all together; But when he did not so, we have Reason to conclude, that the Measure of his Revelations is directed by the End of them; that he intended not the Scripture for a Repository of all Truths, in the simple and most comprehensive Sense of the Word, But of *all* which were needful to *make Men wise unto Salvation*, such as their present Circumstances required, and what he intended they should be accountable for. And, as he would not be Niggardly in these Communications, so neither was he Profuse: Nay, from hence I argue,

4. *Fourthly*, That even all Truths, which may have any Tendency to direct Men in their Duty, are not particularly and expressly to be found there; nor is it all necessary, or indeed, (Humanly speaking) possible, that they should. And This directly meets with an Opinion, unhappy in it's Consequences, but entertained, (it is to be hoped) out of an honest Zeal and well-meant Reverence for these Blessed Writings. That I mean

mean of Mens not being allowed to do any thing, for which some express Command, or Warrant, or at least Example may not be produced out of Scripture. I cannot now stand to shew the Danger and Uncertainty of governing our Lives by the Examples even of Good Men; but shall endeavour to prove the unreasonableness of this Rule in general, and to disengage Men from the many sad Suspenſes and Snares, which it is apt to bring unwary Conſciences under, by these following Particulars.

First, Let it be remembred, that our Obligation to obey the Scriptures, does not arise from their being Written, but from their being the Discoveries of God's Will and our Duty. Consequently, Whatever comes to my Knowledge as his Pleasure concerning me, hath the same binding Power upon my Conscience, be the Method of making it so known to me what it will. The Authority of the Law-Giver, and the sufficient Promulging of the Law: These are the Things, that induce the Obligation to Obedience; And therefore, if God, who is the absolute and only Master of my Conscience, have several ways of signifying his Pleasure, the particular Manner of doing it is accidental and foreign to this Binding Power, and makes not the least Difference in my Engagement to Submission and Obedience.

Now, *Secondly*, We may be satisfy'd, that God not only did formerly, but that he does still use other Methods of manifesting his Will, besides that of the written Word. There have been Times and Persons that knew no other Law but Reason; And when God added a brighter Candle,

he did not put out the old one, or forbid us to walk by it's Light, so far as that is able to direct us. The very Divine Authority of Scripture, and the Being of the God from whence that Authority is derived, are Principles arising from Common Reason. And how absurd would it be to allow no Standard of Truth in Religion, no Rule of Behaviour, but Scripture, when the Two Fundamental Truths of all Religion must be made out to us from other Principles, and cannot with any Propriety of arguing be fetched from Scripture it self?

Thirdly, The very Temper and Composition of Scripture is such, as necessarily refers us to some other Rule: For This is a System of mixed and very different Duties. Some of Eternal and Universal Obligation, Others Occasional and particular, Limited to Times and Circumstances; and when Those Occasions and Circumstances ceased, the Matter of the Command was lost, and the whole Reason and Force of it sunk of course. This is observable, more especially in the Jewish Dispensation, but it is likewise true in sundry other Cases. Now these Things being oftentimes delivered promiscuously and in general Terms, Men must of necessity have Recourse to some other Rule, to distinguish, and guide them in making the just Differences between the one and the other Sort. And This is what Equity and the Reason of the Thing must do, where the Word of God it self hath made no express Difference at all.

Fourthly, The Scriptures as a Rule of Faith and Life, do not concern us, just as the Words and Syl-

Syllables are set down there ; but according to the true Sense, and Rational Meaning of the Text. And in Order to just Resolutions of this kind, many Qualifications are requisite ; A Mind truly Honest, and resign'd to the Will of God, sincere and unprejudiced ; the being not only Content, but Desirous to learn ; and ready to retract Errors, and reform Vices, when upon a Fair Examination they shall appear to be such. To This we must add Diligence, and Care, and Skill ; such as may enable Men to compare, and reconcile, and form a Judgment out of, the Scriptures ; to consider the Contexts, the Occasions, the Expressions, the Genius of the Countries, and Proprieties of Languages, and to fix upon such Commodious Interpretations from hence, as may never set one Scripture at Variance with another. And where these Qualifications are not to be had, there a meek and quiet Spirit, an orderly Submission to honest and better Judgments, and enduring to be Ignorant in Matters above one's Reach. Now, all this is the Work of a Man's own understanding and Will, assisted by God's Grace ; and all so necessary, that without such Application and Appeals to fair unbiass'd Reason, the very Word of God it self may misguide and prove a Snare to us.

Fifthly, The Nature of Humane Actions puts it out of dispute, that the Scriptures alone can never be a full and perfect Direction, in Point of Duty : For the Circumstances of Human Life are infinite, and depend upon a multitude of Accidents, not to be foreseen, and consequently not to be provided against. Hence Laws must run in

in general Terms, and sometimes the Intent of the Law is best fulfilled, by going counter to the Letter of it. In all such Cases therefore Reason and Honesty must guide us to the fitness of the thing, and great Scope is necessarily left to Equity and Discretion. I allow indeed, that God, who hath contented himself with general Rules, could have described all the Accidents and Circumstances, which he cannot but foresee and know exactly. But there is no Reason why he should, and a great deal why he should not. 'Tis much better, that he hath left us to draw general Rules into particular Practice, and put us upon the Tryal of doing this fairly; of discharging a Good Conscience in positive Obedience, where he hath determined things to Moral Good or Evil; and of following the Measures of Integrity and Expediency, where he hath left them indifferent and at large.

The Summ then of this *First* Head may be easily drawn together, within the Compass of these few short Conclusions.

1. *First*, As to the Mysteries and Doctrines peculiar to the Christian Faith, such as, The Incarnation and Satisfaction of our Blessed Saviour, the Justification of Sinners by Faith, the Assistances of the Holy Spirit, the Trinity of Persons in the Divine Essence, (which I make no Scruple to call a necessary and distinguishing Doctrine of the Christian Religion) In these the Scriptures are our absolute and only Rule, For They are Branches of a New Covenant, Revelations of Stupendous and Important Concern, setting forth Free Acts of Mercy; such as depended upon no necessary Causes in Nature; such as concern'd not Man in his primitive

tive State; and therefore not within the Ken of Reason. These could come only from God, and upon Him we are therefore to depend entirely for them. So that when there is sufficient Evidence of His having delivered any Matters of this kind, All the rest is to be taken upon content; and his Truth and Infinite Wisdom are a just Foundation of our Belief, how far soever the Matter revealed may exceed our Comprehension.

2. Secondly, In Matters of Practice the Scripture is our Supreme, though not our only Rule. Those things which Reason and Nature teach, This enlarges and refines upon, and oftentimes confirms with a fresh Sanction. It exalts our Vertues, and directs us to proceed upon nobler Principles; teaches some Duties not to be known without it, gives clearer Convictions of such as were known imperfectly; leads us to Ends above nature, furnishes Means above the Powers of Nature; proposes Rewards Heavenly and Divine, and helps us to do more than mere Men by their own discourse could ever have done. So that Revelation does not quench the Light of Nature, but adds fresh oil, and makes it burn the brighter; And by being more perfect, helping our dimness and dark sight, and taking place above all other Authorities, it is properly styled by David, *A candle to our feet, and a lantern to our paths*, (Psal. cxix. 105.) So that whatever this Word teaches, which we might otherwise have known, has a double eye upon us; and That which either Want of Understanding or Corruption of Mind would have kept us in ignorance of, when found here, is to be received with Submission and Reverence, as an inviolable Law, whatever

ever Flesh and Sense, and Worldly Wisdom may suggest or object to the contrary.

3. *Thirdly*, The Perfection of Scripture does not confine it self to such Matters of Faith and Practice as are absolutely necessary to Salvation, but it is liberal and well fraught with excellent Rules both for improving our Knowledge, and adorning our Profession. It consults the Beauty and Gracefulness, as well as the Life and Being of Christianity. It directs the shining of our Light, and the winning over others by our Prudence and Good Example; and leaves us general Hints, the Efficacy of which will depend upon the Honesty and Discretion of particular Applications to our own personal Exigencies and Conditions.

4. *But Fourthly*, There are many Cases, where Scripture can have nothing at all to do, except by very remote Consequences, and so far only as is implied in the foregoing Particular. Ten thousand Actions of Humane Life there are, so trivial, as scarce to deserve the deliberation of a single Thought. And to expect Laws and Decisions from Almighty God in things of no Importance, or moral Good or Evil, were to bring his Majesty into Contempt; and therefore here Discretion is our only Guide. In short, and to conclude this Argument: The Written Word of God is to be esteemed Sufficient and Perfect; but This is to be understood of having the Sufficiency of Means to the End; and what may serve the Purposes to which it was ordained. The Perfection is that of an Instrument, but then This, like all other Instruments, requires an honest, skilful, and diligent Hand to manage and apply it Successfully. And it

is no Disparagement to the Scripture's Character, that Some by neglecting, and Others by abusing it, still want that Saving Wisdom it might give; Nor does it at all take off from the Perfection of this Rule, that some Cases are so plain and obvious, as not to need its particular Directions, and that Others are of so little moment, as not to deserve them.

II. *Secondly*, The Way being thus made plain, by rightly Stating the Perfection of Scripture, let us now proceed to the *Second* Part of our Business, which is, To instance in some general Arguments, which the Protestant Opinion of the Scripture's Sufficiency, may very reasonably alledge for its self.

Now in order to make Scripture a Competent Guide in the Cases that properly concern it, *Two* things only are necessary; That it be Sufficiently particular and express, and that it be plain and intelligible. That as much be delivered there as the occasion requires; and, That it be delivered in such a manner, as that Men may improve by it, and attain to the Knowledge of it. Both which, to any Man who considers the Uses of Scripture, appear to be so necessarily required, and so greatly related to, that the same General Arguments will prove both, and these that follow, (if I mistake not) may contribute something toward it.

First, A Consideration of the Author. Every Imperfection in the Effect is owing to some Failure in the Cause, a want of Power if it be a Necessary Cause, or a Want of Will if it be a Sufficient and Free Cause. There was therefore excellent Reason,

son, why *St. Paul* should begin his Character of the Scripture's Perfection, with an Account of its being *given by inspiration of God* ; This Introduction carrying in it a very Significant Argument to enforce what follows. For where indeed should we expect Perfection, if not from Him, who is the Source and Summ of all Perfection ? He whose Power and Wisdom are infinite, was most likely to impress upon his own Ordinances such Marks of Excellency, as might distinguish them plainly, and convince the World they were His, by being worthy of Him : And He, whose Goodness and Mercy are the Eminent shining Attributes of the Divinity, might reasonably be presumed to exercise that Power and Wisdom, when an occasion so important as the Salvation of a whole World call'd for it. His own mere Bounty put him upon the mysterious Work of our Redemption, and can we suppose, that the very Terms upon which the Success and Efficacy of that Work depends, are not sufficiently stated and made known ?

We are told indeed, no Writing can be a sufficient Rule, because capable of different Constructions, and that some Living Interpreter is necessary, upon whose Sense we may securely rely : But what Understanding is so short, as not to see the Weakness of this Argument ? For is any thing spoken which might not be written ? and would not the same words when written, continue to be as full, as clear, as plain and distinct, as when spoken only ? Is not any Man's discourse from his Tongue as liable to be wrested and perverted, as that from his Pen ? If then that living Interpreter (whoever he be) might have his Sense committed to writing ;

ting ; and if that Sense when not written, lies open to the same danger of being misunderstood, as when it is written, then a written Word may be as plain and sufficient a Rule as an Oral one. And if Almighty God could express himself as plainly and clearly as Man, (which to deny were most absurd and impious) then nothing hinders, why the Dictates of the Holy Ghost written in the Bible, might not be as safe, as full, as intelligible a Direction, as any Interpretations, or Decrees, composed by any living Persons, or Society of Persons whatsoever. They might be so, I say, which proves a Written Rule capable of equal Perfection with an Oral one. And as the Nature of the thing shews it capable, so the Goodness of God gives just Presumption of its actually being so. We are able indeed to give some Account, why Humane Laws should be obscure ; Men may not be always happy in their Expressions, or they may leave them intricate and dark, and studiously contrive some profitable Ambiguities : But God hath neither Frailty nor Interest to dispose him thus. He speaks on purpose to be understood ; and what is spoken so as not to be understood, is so far forth as if not spoke at all. To leave Men in darkness and distress, unfurnished with Helps, the want of which must be their Eternal Ruine, this is what we think but ill agrees with the kind Inclinations he hath otherwise express'd for our Happiness. And this will appear yet more improbable, if we consider,

Secondly, What the particular Matter is, of which the Scriptures chiefly consist, and are intended to instruct us in. This I have already said is *The Second Covenant* with fallen Man ; and that what

other things are added there, are with Subservience to this Great design. And can we suppose that these Great Charters and Indentures are drawn imperfectly? In other Sciences there may be many Common Principles and Helps deriv'd from abroad; and these are such as shine in some measure by each other's Light. But the Doctrines and Mysteries of Christianity are not in the power of Nature or Art to define; we have no further insight here, than what the Light from Heaven directs us to; and whatever of this kind God hath not made known to us, we are condemned to Doubts and Difficulties invincible, and can never bring our selves to know it at all.

Thirdly, The Sufficiency and Plainness of Scripture are both of them strongly implied in Faith and Obedience, being made the Conditions of Everlasting Salvation; and Unbelief and Disobedience threatned with Hell and Damnation, to as many as live under the Knowledge and Light of the Gospel. For if Belief and Practice must bring us to Heaven, then sure God hath left a Complete System of all things necessary to be believed or done; And if Men shall be damned for not believing and not practising, then sure these Directions are sufficiently plain: Especially too, if we remember, that these Conditions are not calculated for the Wise, or the Learned, or the Great only; but imposed indifferently upon all Degrees and Capacities of Men, of what size soever their Understandings or their Attainments be. For in regard no Man is capable of Believing or Doing, what he is not capable of knowing the Sense and Meaning of; it must needs follow, that in the Terms of

of Salvation, God hath descended to the Weak and the Common Man; and made that which is necessary to All, easie and plain to All. The Extremity of *marking what is done amiss, who, says the Psalmist, may abide?* But would not the marking and punishing what could not but be done amiss, be a much more insupportable Extremity? And yet, admitting that Men are condemned to Everlasting Torments, for failure in that Duty of which God never gave them sufficient Means of Information, I cannot apprehend, but that this is the Case with them. The Force of which Argument in general, That God must needs have made sufficient Discoveries of his Will, is so confessedly evident, that the only Fault our Adversaries find with us for alledging it, is the confining these Discoveries to Scripture only; to justify which Inference I add in the

Fourth place, That we have no equal Evidence for any other Supplementary Declaration of God's Will, and therefore we have Reason to look upon the Scriptures as a full and Sufficient one. Now, that such Evidence was absolutely needful, appears from hence, That whatsoever mends and fills up the Measure of any other Law, and to which we must have our last Recourse and Appeal, does by that Means acquire not only equal, but in some sort a superiour Authority to what went before; and therefore, to be sure, it ought to have it's own Authority, at least as well confirm'd, as That which it pretends to perfect. Now, the Scriptures command our Assent and Obedience, as coming from God, That they came from Him we are assured, by their Authors giving

In his quæ
aperte in
scripturâ po-
sita sunt, in-
veniuntur illa
omnia quæ
continent arq;
dem moresq;
vivendi, spem
scilicet arq;
Charitatem.
*Augustin. de
Doctrin. Chri-
stian. Lib. II.
Cap. 9.*

giving Proper and Authentick Testimonies of a Commission and Inspiration truly Divine ; That the Miracles in which that Testimony consisted, were really performed, we have the Report of Enemies as well as Friends to their Doctrine ; The Proof of Infinite Converts won over by them, contrary to all the Interest and Inclinations of Flesh and Blood ; and Lastly, The concurring Consent of the Church Universal in all Ages, which alone (all Circumstances consider'd) is an Evidence even Credible in it self. Till therefore the Advancers of Traditions and an Infallible Guide on the one Hand, and till the Pretenders to private Illuminations on the other, can bring equal Evidence for themselves ; but especially while they continue the darkest Controversies in all Religion ; we are not to be blamed for not admitting them into Competition ; and shall do better to suspect these Pretences of Vanity and Enthusiasm, and Project ; than by admitting them to draw such a meaning upon the Words of this Text, as might easily be shewed to introduce an inspired Apostle, talking neither good Argument, nor so much as Coherent and common Sense.

The Summ then of my Second Head is This, That, according to all we can reasonably conceive of God, he must needs have made some Competent Provision for Men's understanding their Duty ; They cannot escape eternal Ruine, without the Knowledge of it ; This Knowledge, in the Points peculiarly Christian, could come to them by Divine Revelation only ; It does not appear that God hath signaliz'd and distinguish'd any Method or Rule

Rule of this kind, in so eminent a manner, as he hath done the Scriptures; and therefore we have reason to believe, and to respect the Scriptures, as that competent Provision. And now, having gone thro' such general Arguments as seem most necessary, I come to the *Third* and last Thing, which is,

III. To shew in particular as briefly as I can, How the Scriptures answer this Character, with Regard to the several Instances of their Usefulness mention'd in the Text.

1. *First*, St. Paul says, The Scripture is profitable for Doctrine, by which is commonly understood, a Declaration of such Truths as are necessary to be believed. The Summ of what is requisite in this Point, consists of a right Information concerning God and our selves: What He is, and what we are and hope to be; What he hath done for our Sakes, and How we may reap the Benefit of it in our own Persons, and become acceptable in his Sight. And of this the Scripture gives a large and clear Account. It traces us up to our first Head, points to the Rock whence we were hewn; describes our Happy and our Healthful State, tells when, and how, our Innocence was lost, and sets forth both the Sickness and the Cure. It presents us with the leisurely Advances towards it, the Personal Revelations to the Patriarchs, The Rites and Figures of *Moses's* Law, The clearer Predictions, and more refined Precepts of the Prophets, and These accommodated to the several Stages of the World, and tempered all in such Proportion, as the Body diseased gathered Strength to digest them. At last,

last, when the fulness of Time was come, and Matters ripe for the last and most perfect Revelation, it shews us the Saviour of the World, the Son of God, and in Him all those Shadows and rough imperfect Strokes finished and filled up, all those Prophecies centring together, with marvellous Harmony and Consent. To These I might add the significant Providences of God to his People, the Jews, whereby St. Paul says they became *typus veri*, Patterns, and Images of the Christian Age; no less than in their Law and Way of Worship. I might observe the mighty Care and Art of filling every Book with Significations of the Messiah, his Character, and his Approach, sometimes by Prophecies aiming directly at him, sometimes by mix'd and more obscure Intimations, and those breakings out of the Spirit from other Subjects and Persons, into Expressions so lofty and Magnificent, to be literally and strictly true of any but of Him. But, which comes nearer Home, here we have our Souls raised to higher and juster Notions of God and Goodness; we are taught to worship him in Spirit and in Truth, a Service most suitable to the Majesty of His Nature, and the Dignity of our own: We see the Adorable Mystery of the Son of God in Flesh and a Human Body, exalted to the Right-Hand of the Majesty on high, a Person truly Divine conversing with Men, courting them to their Happinesses, pressing, importuning; nay, which is most of all, Dying for Them, that They may live for ever. And whatever mysterious and intricate Passages the Scripture may contain, for the Exercise, shall I say, or for the Humiliation of Men

Men Wise in their own Conceits, yet These Matters which make the Historical Account of our Redemption are related in Circumstances so natural, and yet so moving, in Language so easie, and so expressive too; that the most Scrupulous, if a fair and honest, Reader may be settled and convinced; and the plainest and grossest Understanding may be enlightned and edified by them. For whatever Darkness and Mists may now obscure these saving Truths, it is not from themselves or their original Ambiguities, so much as from the studied Niceties of Subtil and Designing Men; Who, under Pretence of distinguishing and explaining, have rather confounded and rendred them Unintelligible; and many times distinguished away even Truth and Piety it self: But, blessed be God we are not utterly at these Mens Mercies, for to our Comfort, the Apostle observes,

2. *Secondly*, That the Scripture is likewise Profitable for *Reproof*; by which is commonly understood the Confuting of Errors and corrupt Opinions, which oppose or impair the Truth. * Thus among the Jews, the Law and the Testimony was the Touch and Tryal, to which all new Pretenders were to be brought. Thus our Saviour expressly attributes the *Sadduces* Error concerning the Resurrection and a Future State, to their not knowing the Scriptures. And to the same Purpose the Apostle here sends *Timothy* to the Scriptures, as a Defence against those Corrupt and Perillous times foretold in the Beginning of this Chapter. The earnest Exhortations of all the Primitive Fathers, to be much conversant in these Holy Books; Their placing all the Mischief of their Divisions to the Account of neglecting so to do; the setting the Two

* Isai. viii.
20. Marr. xxii.
29. Mar. xii.
24. Ημῖς τοῦ-
τον, ὅταν περὶ
ἀρετῆς μα-
χόμεθα, καὶ
καθοπλισόμε-
θα ἐν τοῖς βιβλίοις,
καὶ ἰσχυρίζομεθα.
scu ut alii te-
gunt, ἰσχυροί
ἐσθίμεθα. Πᾶσα
ῥῆ γὰρ ἐστὶν, &c.
ἐκ τῶν τῶν
ἐκ τῶν δὲ μὴ
ἐκ τῶν δὲ τοῦ-
τον ἐκ ἀπ' αὐ-
τοῦ. Chrylost. in
Johan. Hom.

Testaments, in the midst of the Ancient and purest Councils, as a common Umpire between all contending Parties; and infinite Testimonies and Commendations to this purpose, shew most evidently, that the Written Word was always look'd upon as the Standard of Doctrine and Faith; That to which all ought to have recourse, to submit to, and be finally concluded by. Traditionary Articles, and Infalible Interpreters, had then no place, nor was it requisite they ever should: For though St. Peter says some Scriptures were wrested to mens own destruction, yet he acquaints us withal, how they came to be so. They were, he says, *the unlearned and unstable*, that did it, Men not well principled, and of a restless Temper. And if People will come to this Rule with perverse, unquiet Minds, with a Spirit of Frowardness, and Caviil, and Contention, they may, no doubt, confound the clearest Things: Besides (which makes the Objection much less formidable) St. Peter says the *τις δυσνόητα*, Passages hard to be understood were principally concerned in this racking of the Sense. And so long as Captious Wits exercise upon These only, the Consequence is not so very great. They are the necessary Points in which we maintain the Sufficiency of Scripture, and I hope it hath been proved, that what is not full and plain, cannot be necessary. If Men would read the Bible with Honesty and Diligence, with Meekness and Modesty, the World would quickly come to a good Agreement in Things requisite to Salvation; and for the rest, we may entertain different Notions, and yet all sides be safe and quiet. And would Men but preserve all that Charity and Good Temper, which becomes Disputes of small Importance,

it would signifie but little, whether such Controversies were ever agreed or not. When Mens Eternal State is brought into hazard, when the Peace of the Publick, or the Order of the Church is broken, when private Friendships cease, and Misunderstandings and Bickerings arise; These are not the Effects of Difference in Opinion, but of the Vanity and Indiscretion, the Intemperate Heats, and bitter Zeal of those who differ, and not content to differ only, mismanage and misunderstand Matters. In short, *Holding the Faith in Unity of Spirit, and in the Bond of Peace* both, is best promoted by Righteousness of Life. And whoever shall examine the Rise and Growth of Heresies and Schisms, will find that Craft and not Ignorance hath generally been at the Bottom. Pride and Avarice, and Ambition, Envy and Licentiousness, Unreasonable Pertinaciousness, and a Desire of Popularity, and in one Word, not so much the Want as the Abuse of Wit; These are the rank Weeds that choak the Good Seed, that make the Word Unfruitful, and sometimes even ensnaring. And to clear the Soil of these Nuisances must be every Man's own Care. In short. God hath done as much for us, as it became him to do; he hath left Necessary Truth plain and obvious, he will be gracious to innocent and unaffected Ignorance and Mistakes; and therefore, tho' All may be deceived in unnecessary Points, yet None shall be deceived to his own Hurt and Ruine; Except those who wilfully deceive themselves, or make it their Business to pervert and disturb others.

3. *Thirdly*, the next Instance of the Scripture's Profitableness is in *Correction*, that is, according to the common Acceptation of the Word, Re-

forming of Manners. And in this indeed, consists the peculiar Glory of Christianity, that it makes the World better, sweetens Mens Tempers, purifies their Hearts and Affections, tames their wild Passions, and checks those Exorbitancies, which render them Odious to God, Uneasie to themselves, and Troublesome to one another. That no Man therefore might have Ignorance to pretend, this Doctrine, like a Light hung out from Heaven, descends the Rocks and Shelves that threaten us with Shipwrack of Faith and a good Conscience. And if it happen, (as God knows it does, and often will even to the Best of Men) that we be driven upon these Rocks, we are then instructed, exhorted, entreated, conjured to recover our selves by speedy and serious Repentance; to call up all the Powers of Reason and Religion; and to quicken us the more, we are told the Dangers of Delay, the sad Doom of Obstinacy and Impenitence. We are kept in Awe even from our secret Sins, by the constant Presence, and strict Observation of an All-seeing Judge; One from whose Thunder no Covert can shelter, and from whose Eye no Darkness can hide us; One that does not only pursue us to our Closets and Beds, but unlocks our very Hearts and Reins, and sees all the Monsters, all the deformed Race of evil Thoughts and Actions, even in their Embryo and crude Conception. Here we have Vice unmask'd, and shewn in it's Native Devilishness; as the Blackest and basest Thing in it self; the most Deceitful in its Appearances, the most Destructive in its Effects. The Mother of Sorrow, and Shame, and Death, that cheats us with Imaginary Pleasures of a Moment, and Satisfactions that flee

flee from us in the very Instant of snatching them; but leaves real and lasting Pains behind, abandons us to all the Horrors of Guilt, and Confusion, Amazement and Despair, sows all the Seeds of Discord and Disorder, breaks all Faith, cuts the Bands of Society in sunder, and after all the Agonies of Mind, Pains of Body, private and publick Miseries on Earth, plunges Men at last into the Bottomless Pit; a Place of Vengeance and fruitless Remorses; the Gnawings of a Worm that never dies, and the Burnings of a Flame never to be quenched. These are the Terrors of the Lord to perswade Men to be Wiser, and stupid sure are They, whom these will not perswade.

Once more, *Fourthly*, The Scripture is said to be Profitable for *Instruction in Righteousness*, that is, The directing us how we may please, and become like unto God. To this Purpose it prescribes pure and holy Hearts, clean Hands, well-govern'd Passions, a strict and watchful Guard against Temptation; a Mind easie and resign'd to Providence, rais'd above the present World, and therefore Moderate in its Desires, and reserv'd in its Enjoyments. It consults the Benefit of all Conditions, and prescribes Virtues proper for every Relation and Capacity of Human Life. It invites to the Practice of These, by their own Loveliness and Beauty, By the Satisfaction they bring to our Selves, and the Benefit they are of to Others: For if a Gracefulness of Behaviour, and perpetual Consistency with a Man's self; if the Ease and Transport of one's own Mind, and the Commendation of other People; If Health, and Peace, and mutual Happiness; If the Blessings which

which a Good Life hath a natural Tendency to produce, and those which it gives a Title to, by recommending Men to the more Especial Favour and Protection of God; if the aspiring to be like Him here, and the Assurance of being Eternally Happy with him hereafter: If These, I say, have any Charms, (and surely Charms they have to all, but lost and stupified Souls) then it must be acknowledged, that Men want no sufficient Instruction in Righteousness, while they enjoy the Scripture.

These are the Four Topicks resulting from the most usual Sense of the Text; but if we interpret *ἰσχυροποιῶν*, as some do, of *strengthening that which is Weak*, and instead of *Correction*, understand *Support to feeble and dejected Minds*; then St. Paul's Observation to the Romans, will be included here also, where he says, that *these things were written for our Learning, that We through Patience and Comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.* (Rom. XV. 4.) And here, Blessed God! What Consolations does the Scripture, what rather does it not supply us with on these Occasions? What firm Grounds of a stedfast Confidence in an Almighty and Compassionate Father, a Father always able, and always ready to help; a Father, that chastises because he loves, and only grieves with a Design to profit? What Patterns of distress and injured, and of rewarded and successful Virtue does it set before our Eyes, and bids us arm our Minds by Their Examples? The Patriarchs, the Prophets, the Apostles, but above all, the Meek and Suffering Jesus! And here, how Glorious a Scene does it draw, what Triumph what Crowns does it propose, how

how ravishing a Prospect does it open, by those Assurances, that all who suffer for and with him, shall also live and reign with him for ever ! The sweet Transports of a Good Conscience, the Supporting Sense of a reconciled God, but especially the Experience of his Favour, and the Earnests and Expectation of a Bless'd Eternity ; These break in upon Good Men like Light through a Cloud, and are able, if well and warmly applied, to charm all our Griefs, and all our Fears, to calm and smooth our very roughest Passage thro' this Valley of Tears, and to take out the Sting of that last greatest Terrour to poor feeble Men, by softning, nay even recommending Temporal Death it self to us.

O Welcome therefore Holy Religion to us dark wretched Mortals ! Welcome, thou Blest, thou Powerful Book, Pure and Clear as the Place from whence thou comest, and Wise and Good, like Him whose Spirit form'd thee. And may, (my Christian Brethren) This be ever First and Best in our Esteem, most in our Thoughts, our Studies and Desires : may This be writ entire, and fairly copied not in our Memories only, but our Hearts ; and thence shine Bright in all our Conversations. And Reason good there is, why This Divine Volume should have the Choice of all our Labours ; for This will sanctifie our other Studies, enlarge our Understandings, refine and exalt our Souls, and teach us not only to excell Others, but Daily to excell our Selves. This is the only Exception to the Preacher's Character, *In much of all other knowledge, there is much sorrow*, but this makes us wise with Pleasure and Safety ; not only wiser for this.

this World, than the rest of our Learning can, but, which is best of all, and a Prerogative peculiar to its self alone, This makes us wise for Heaven, and to Salvation.

All Thanks therefore and due Praise be rendered to our Gracious God, for these his Revelations, Praise for their General Benefit and Influence; but double Praise for those Advantages, by which we have not only Leisure, but Obligations and Indispensible Engagements to employ our selves in those Holy and Heavenly Studies; Praise for the Bounty of those venerable Saints, whose Beneficence hath Dedicated so many Souls to God, and made Provision for winning over others by their Holy Labours, so long as Time shall last. Praise lastly for the Shine of Their good Examples, who in their several Stations and Proportions, have contributed to the Advancement of Learning and Religion; whose Names, as well to testify our Gratitude, as to provoke our selves and others to Good Works, and the like Labour of Love, it is now my Duty to rehearse; and may the Recital at this and at all other Times answer the Ends of so Pious an Institution.

Here followed the Commemoration of
BENEFACTORS.

To God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, be all Honour and Glory, now and for evermore. Amen.

F I N I S.

